Maryland
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Carey M. Wright, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Schools

TO: Members of the Education Policy Committee

FROM: Carey M. Wright, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Schools

DATE: November 19, 2026

SUBJECT: Maryland Civic Excellence Program — Proposed COMAR 13A.03.09

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

Pillar 3: College and Career Readiness
Goal: Every student graduates high school college and career ready.
Outcome: Students demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for successful participation in postsecondary education, careers, and civic life.

Purpose

The purpose of this transmittal is to present proposed regulations establishing the Maryland Civic Excellence Program. The program would recognize graduating public high school students who demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and participation through the Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence, which would be affixed to the student's diploma and noted on the official transcript.

Following the passage of Senate Bill 204 / House Bill 57 (2026 Session), the proposed regulations implement Education Article, §§2-205 and 7-139, Annotated Code of Maryland, and establish State criteria while allowing local school systems flexibility in how participating programs are implemented.

Background

The proposed COMAR chapter establishes a voluntary Maryland Civic Excellence Program through which a participating local school system may award the Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence to eligible graduating public high school students. The proposed regulations define civic readiness, civic knowledge, civic engagement, civic organizations, and the capstone project, and establish State-level criteria for earning the Seal.

To earn the Seal, a student must earn a minimum of six points across the Civic Knowledge and Civic Engagement domains, with at least two points in each domain, and successfully complete a capstone project. Points may be earned through a Department-approved menu of options, and local school systems may request approval for additional options or alternative means of earning points when necessary to ensure equitable access.

Participation is voluntary at the local school-system level. A participating local school system must submit an application to the Department, designate a Seal of Civic Excellence Coordinator, establish procedures for documenting and verifying student completion, ensure equitable access, and describe its local capstone

framework and procedures for approving civic engagement activities and civic organizations. Local approval would be valid for three years and may be renewed.

Executive Summary

1. Establishes a statewide framework for the Maryland Civic Excellence Program and the Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence, while preserving local school system flexibility in program implementation.
    - The Seal recognizes graduating public high school students who demonstrate civic readiness through civic knowledge and civic engagement.
    - The Seal would be recognized through cords, medal, or other insignia affixed to the student's high school diploma and noted on the student's official transcript.
2. Defines State criteria for earning the Seal, including a minimum of six points across two proficiency domains and successful completion of an inquiry-based capstone project.
    - Students must earn at least two points in Civic Knowledge and two points in Civic Engagement; the remaining two points may be earned in either domain.
    - Civic Knowledge includes constitutional principles, democratic institutions, civil society, global awareness, participation in public life, government roles and relationships, and media and information literacy
    - Civic Engagement includes activities such as service-learning, student leadership, government or public service, community-based projects, and civic internships.
3. Establishes requirements for local school-system participation, verification, equitable access, and program monitoring.
    - Local school systems seeking to participate must apply to the Department and demonstrate alignment with State criteria.
    - Local school systems must provide meaningful opportunities for all students, including students with disabilities and multilingual learners, and provide required accommodations.
    - Participating local school systems must report annual participation and completion data to the Department beginning July 1, 2028.

Action

The State Board is asked to review and approve the proposed regulations establishing COMAR 13A.03.09, Maryland Civic Excellence Program, for the next stage of the regulatory process.

Attachments

Maryland Civic Excellence Program - EPC - Permission to Publish.pptx

Maryland Civic Excellence Program 13A.03.09.docx

Title 13A STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Subtitle 03 GENERAL INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

Chapter 09 Maryland Civic Excellence Program

Authority: Education Article, §§2-205 and 7-139, Annotated Code of Maryland

.01 Purpose.

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the Maryland Civic Excellence Program to recognize graduating public high school students who have attained demonstrated levels of civic knowledge, skills, and participation.

.02 Definitions.

A. In this chapter, the following terms have the meanings indicated.

B. Terms Defined.

(1) "Civic readiness" means the demonstrated civic knowledge, skills, dispositions, and engagement necessary to participate effectively, responsibly, and ethically in civic life.

(2) Civic Knowledge.

(a) "Civic knowledge" means demonstrated understanding and application of constitutional principles, democratic institutions, civil society, global awareness, participation in public life, and the roles and relationships of government at the local, state, tribal, and federal levels, as a foundation for a student's civic readiness.

(b) "Civic knowledge" includes media and information literacy, meaning the ability to evaluate the credibility, relevance, and bias of sources; recognize misinformation, disinformation, or manipulated content; and analyze information and data relevant to civic issues.

(3) "Civic engagement" means active participation in civic and democratic life through activities that contribute to a community, inform public decision-making, or support civic or governmental processes, including but not limited to service-learning, student leadership, government or public service, community-based projects, or civic internships.

(4) Civic Organization.

(a) "Civic organization" means a school, community, governmental, or nonprofit entity that provides opportunities for students to engage in public service, community improvement, or democratic participation in furtherance of civic learning and community engagement.

(b) "Civic organization" includes:

(i) School-based programming;

(ii) Institutions of higher education;

(iii) Libraries, museums, and other educational or cultural institutions that provide opportunities aligned with the purposes of the Seal;

(iv) Faith-based or cultural organizations when the student's participation is connected to a clearly defined civic purpose, such as service, community improvement, advocacy, or democratic participation, and is not limited to religious instruction; and

(v) Other organizations approved by the local school system if the local school system determines and documents that the organization's student opportunities align with the purposes of the Seal.

(c) "Civic organization" does not include a partisan political campaign, partisan electoral activity, or political party organization when the student's participation is primarily intended to support or oppose a candidate or political party.

(5) "Capstone project" means an inquiry-based, culminating project through which a student investigates a civic issue and reflects on outcomes and learning.

(6) "Seal" means the Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence.

.03 State Criteria for the Seal of Civil Excellence.

A. To earn the Seal, a student shall demonstrate civic readiness by:

(1) Earning a minimum of six points in accordance with §B of this regulation; and

(2) Successfully completing a capstone project.

B. A student shall earn a minimum of six points across the two proficiency domains of Civic Knowledge and Civic Engagement, with at least:

(1) Two points in Civic Knowledge;

(2) Two points in Civic Engagement, including those earned through completion of the required capstone project; and

(3) The remaining two points earned in either domain.

C. Points may be earned through a menu of options approved by the Department. The Department shall establish and publish the menu of eligible activities and the criteria for assigning point values for each proficiency domain.

D. A local school system may request approval from the Department to add an option to the menu, or to approve an alternative means by which an individual student may earn points where necessary to ensure equitable access.

E. Service learning hours that a student completes under COMAR 13A.03.02.05 may be counted toward the Civic Engagement criteria if the activities are eligible for points.

F. Capstone Project.

(1) The capstone project shall be completed through an extracurricular activity focused on civic service and conducted through a civic organization.

(2) The extracurricular activity through which the capstone project is completed may be an existing extracurricular activity at the time the local school system chooses to participate in the program or a new extracurricular activity supervised by a staff member employed by the local school system.

(3) A staff member may supervise a student's participation in an extracurricular activity for purposes of completing the capstone project without administering the activity.

.04 Local School System Approval.

A. A local school system seeking to award the Seal shall submit an application to the Department for approval.

B. The application shall include:

(1) A description of how the local program aligns with State criteria;

(2) Designation of a Seal of Civic Excellence Coordinator, responsible for administering the local program and coordinating implementation with the State;

(3) Procedures for documenting, verifying, and maintaining evidence of student completion of the Seal requirements;

(4) Plans for ensuring equitable access to the program and to qualifying activities for all students, including plans for taking the program systemwide at the conclusion of a pilot year if one is requested;

(5) A description of the local school system's capstone project framework, including the requirements for completion and how student performance will be assessed;

(6) Procedures for reviewing and approving civic engagement activities and civic organizations that meet the criteria for the Seal; and

(7) Procedures for collecting, maintaining, and reporting program participation and completion data to the Department.

C. Approval shall be valid for three years and may be renewed upon submission of an application demonstrating continued compliance with State criteria.

.05 Verification and Awarding of the Seal.

A. The principal, or the principal's designee, of a high school shall certify that a student has met all requirements for the Seal.

B. The local school system Seal of Civic Excellence Coordinator shall verify the certification and supporting documentation prior to the local school system's awarding of the Seal.

C. A participating local school system shall recognize the award by providing a cord, medal, or other insignia, and shall attach the Seal or other insignia to the student's high school diploma. The Seal shall also be noted on the student's transcript.

D. The Department may conduct audits of local records to ensure fidelity.

.06 Equitable Access.

A. Local school systems shall ensure that all students, including students with disabilities and multilingual learners, have meaningful opportunities to meet the requirements for the Seal.

B. Except as provided in §C of this regulation, if a local school system elects to participate in the program, each public high school in the local school system shall implement the program.

C. With the approval of the Department, a local school system may pilot the program in designated schools for a period of one year before implementing the program systemwide.

D. Local school systems shall provide accommodations as required by a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 plan.

E. No fee shall be charged to a student to participate in the Maryland Civic Excellence Program.

.07 Program Monitoring and Reporting.

A. On or before July 1, 2028, and each July 1 thereafter, each participating local school system shall report to the Department, for the most recently completed school year, the number of students awarded the Seal, disaggregated by student subgroup as defined by federal and State law.

B. The Department shall publish annual statewide data on program participation and outcomes.





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Maryland Civic Excellence Program

Regulations for Permission to Publish

November 19, 2026

PRESENTED BY

Peter Ramsey, Director of the Social Studies

Laurel Cratsley, Executive Director of Government Affairs

Richard Kincaid, Assistant State Superintendent, Division of College and Career Pathways

Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence Workgroup

Statewide Program Inventory

Beginning in June 2026, MSDE gathered an **inventory of existing programming** across the state to understand current practices and inform program development.

Broad Stakeholder Participation

The workgroup included a **diverse groups of perspectives**, including educators, school and district leaders, students, higher education faculty, and civic education organizations, **representing seven Maryland counties**.

Cross-Divisional Collaboration

The work was a **cross-Divisional, collaborative effort** across the Office of Social Studies, Government Affairs, Division of College and Career Preparedness, and Student Support teams.

Workgroup Charge

The workgroup met four times between July and September, charged with **developing the regulatory framework** to guide implementation.

The Three Components of a Civic Seal

Standard Elements of Civic Seals Nationwide



Civic Knowledge

Demonstration of civic content mastery: how government works, constitutional principles, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Commonly certified through coursework, GPA, and standardized assessments.



Experiential Learning and Engagement

Applied civic participation. It often takes the form of service-learning hours, a community project, an internship or government experience, student government, or qualifying extracurriculars.



Civic Reflection

Structured meaning-making, the student examining and articulating what a civic experience taught them, through a written reflection, a capstone narrative, a portfolio, or a senior interview.

Review of the Legislative Framework

- **House Bill 57 / Senate Bill 204** established the Maryland Civic Excellence Program (2026).
- The law creates a **voluntary program** for districts to opt into beginning in SY 2027-28.
- MSDE shall **adopt regulations** to establish the program criteria and requirements for districts.
- Students **must complete a capstone project through an extracurricular activity** to earn the Seal.
- Districts may **partner with eligible organizations** to support implementation.
- If a district chooses to participate, **all schools within that district must participate**.
- Students who successfully earn the seal are recognized with a cord, medal, or diploma insignia.



Regulatory Highlights

Student Achievement Criteria

Modeled after New York's points-based system, students must earn at least six points across two categories, Civic Knowledge and Civic Engagement, with a minimum of two points in each domain, and successfully complete a capstone project.

Flexible Pathways to Earn Points

MSDE will establish a statewide menu of eligible activities and point values outside of regulations. LEAs may request approval for additional activities or alternative ways for individual students to earn points to support equitable access.

Capstone Project Requirements

Students must complete an inquiry-based project investigating a civic issue through an extracurricular activity focused on civic service and conducted through a civic organization.

Defining Civic Organizations

Eligible organizations include schools, governmental entities, civic nonprofits, institutions of higher education, libraries, museums, and qualifying faith-based and cultural organizations. Partisan political campaigns and party activities are excluded.

Local School System Participation

LEAs must apply to MSDE for program approval, designate a local program coordinator, and renew approval every three years. Principals or designees certify student completion, with coordinators verifying supporting documentation and sharing data.

Model – Points-Based System in New York

Points System

A student must complete all requirements for a New York State diploma and earn a **total of six points.**

At least **two points in Civic Knowledge** + at least **two points in Civic Participation**.

Guidance, not Regulations

The menu of options lives outside of the regulatory framework.

Civic Knowledge	Pts.	Civic Participation	Pts.
4 credits of social studies	1	High School Civics Project (limit two times during grades 9-12)	1.5
Mastery level on Social Studies Regents Exam	1.5*	Service-Learning Project (minimum 25 hours) and reflective civic learning essay/presentation/product	1*
Proficiency level on Social Studies Regents Exam	1*	Earned credit in an elective course that promotes civic engagement	.5*
Advanced social studies course(s)	.5*	Middle School Capstone Project (Grades 7 and 8 are only eligible for this point)	1
Research Project	1	Extra-curricular participation or work-based learning experience (minimum 40 hours) and an essay/presentation/product	.5*
		Civics Capstone Project	4

*Students may receive these points more than once.

What's Next?

Continued Stakeholder Engagement
LEA School Counselors Group
LEA Directors of Student Services
Maryland Association of Student Councils
Maryland Association of Secondary School Principals
LEA Directors of Social Studies
Local Superintendents (PSSAM) & Local School Boards (MABE)
LEA Chief Academic Officers
Maryland State Education Association
Civic organizations

Development of Future Guidance
Guidance materials and the Seal of Civic Excellence Guidebook will be developed outside the workgroup, with opportunities for review and feedback.

Timeline for Future Action
Pending approval for permission to publish, public comment, and final adoption, guidance will be released in Spring 2027.

